

*World Vegetation Types*. By S. R. EYRE, ed. 264 pp. Columbia University Press, New York. 1971. \$12.50.

This is an anthology of papers, or rather of parts of papers and books by 21 recognized authorities in the field of vegetation. The editor points out in his foreword that his first aim has been to present a set of studies that are fairly representative of those main types of wild vegetation that, until recently, covered much of the land area of the earth; the second has been to include only that kind of work that takes cognisance of ecological status and vegetation development. These goals are not entirely reached as some of the papers contain nothing significant on ecology or community dynamics, and some major types of vegetation are ignored altogether, e.g. broad-leaved deciduous forests.

To prepare an anthology is a thankless job as readers are quick to miss their favorite works but this is inevitable, especially if the entire selection must be as limited as in this little volume. Nevertheless, the choice does not always appear to be the best. Thus the brief excerpt from Carl Sauer surely represents his less inspired writings when he concludes that grasslands "are an impoverished assemblage, not a fully developed organic household or community". If the editor meant to select writings which, in the main, attempt the functions of both description and interpretation, as he claims in the introduction, then the choice of Weaver and Albertson's "The Origin of the Mixed Prairie" is baffling as both authors have given such excellent descriptions of various prairie types.

However, the editor succeeded in presenting a variety of publications by some of the most illustrious authorities on vegetation, and some of the papers, as those by Richards, Beard, Keay, Jackson, Hastings and Turner, Keller, and Polunin permit a real insight into the nature of the formations they discuss. Other papers are often of the same quality although more limited in scope, e.g. those by Aubréville, Weaver and Clements, Cockayne, Cooper, Robbins, and others.

A comprehensive treatment of the vegetation of any area includes a discussion of structure, floristic composition, community dynamics, and ecological features. In this anthology, none of the authors treats the vegetation of their respective areas in such a comprehensive fashion. This may be due to their personal inclinations or to the fact that the presentations are, after all, only brief excerpts. The reader should therefore not expect a very systematic treatment of the various vegetation types. On the other hand, the combination of the papers by Richards, Beard and Aubréville on the rain forests of tropical lowlands does give him an excellent understanding of the nature and the complexities of this formation. The attempt to produce a similar effect by a combination of grassland papers is less successful.

The value of this anthology lies perhaps not so much in what it sets out to achieve. It seems to lie rather in the fact that it illustrates a great variety of approaches to the study of vegetation. Thus, an author embarking on the investigation of a particular vegetation type may profit considerably from studying this anthology in order to assure a comprehensive and well organized presentation.

The book has a small set of illustrations, taken from the original works. Perhaps this is the natural and right thing to do. But it means that the illustrations for this anthology must be taken from printed versions, and this has distinct drawbacks, especially with regard to the technicalities of reproduction. Considering the superb photographs now available of so many vegetation types, one wonders whether it might not have been desirable to replace the old pictures with fresh and more effective ones. But this may not have been feasible.

The book closes with a selected bibliography of nine pages, concerning only the discussed vegetation types. It is a stimulating book and should be particularly useful as supplementary reading in university courses on vegetation.—A. W. KÜCHLER, Department of Geography, University of Kansas, Lawrence 66044.